Task Group Sharing[1]

Task group sharing among the Washo occurred in connection with the breakdown of products that resulted from efforts of hunting, fishing, and gathering parties that were larger that the household. The division of goods in this case was not necessarily in proportion to the amount of work contributed. Often mere presence with the party was sufficient to receive an equal share. Goods were usually divided equally among all the adult members of the task group. The meat of a single deer shot by a party of hunters was divided equally regardless of whose arrow actually brought the deer down. No information is available on how the hide and head were divided. In view of Washo techniques of clothing manufacture we would think that it would not be cut up, but given whole to one man. The Kawaiisu gave it to the hunter whose arrow brought the deer down (Cappannari 1960).

Slight variations were present in some divisions of the products depending on such things as ownership of a rabbit net or shamanistic powers in antelope drives. Rabbits (p¢lleu) were killed by individuals for meat anytime of the year, but winter communal drives (p¢lleu ush¢¢sh) provided most of the skins used in blankets and a great deal of meat. In winter the furs were in their prime. Also the diverse fishing and gathering activities of the summer were over so that people had spare time on their hands.

Rabbit nets (p¢lleu digush) were woven of plant fibers. These nets were about four feet high and usually from 20 to 40 feet in length. The nets were repaired and gradually added to in length over the years. Fremont wrote that "These nets were, perhaps, 30 to 40 feet long kept upright in the ground by slight sticks at intervals, and were made from a kind of wild hemp, very much resembling in manufacture those common among the Indians of the Sacramento Valley." (Nevins 1956, 355). Barrett (1917, 11) said that the rabbit nets were reported to be like those used by the Paviotso and usually some 300 feet long. The present writer's informants said that individually owned nets were tied together during a drive to form a single net 300 feet long. The combined nets were strung out across the floor of a valley or along the side of a hill. As the rabbit drivers moved across the country they shot rabbits with their bows and arrows and pulled them out of holes by forcing sticks down and twisting the stick into the rabbit fur. Plate IV, A illustrates a rabbit drive.

The people who owned the nets with some of their family would club, strangle, or crush the temples of the rabbits that got tangled in the nets. Each day for three or four days the nets were set up and a drive was held in

1. This writer is indebted to Anastasio (n.d.) for the term and concept of the "task group" as it is found in the Basin-Plateau area.

the house of either of their parents. When the couple had a few children of their own they might then set up a household separate from their parents. 591

Although not as important as the destruction of the goods of the deceased, gifts were given by the mourners to the deceased. There is an indication in the notes of Dangberg (n.d., 6) that the gifts were laid upon the corpse and buried with it. The gifts were offered to the spirit of the deceased to make it content to stay away. 764 431 [782] [775]

Feasts

The feast was characterized by the distribution of an abundance of food and the announcement that anyone who comes will be fed. There was often dancing, games, and gambling at these events. Sponsorship was of three kinds: kinship group, task group, and communal. 574

The kinship-group sponsored feasts were connected with births and puberty ceremonies. The feast following a birth was a small affair and only close friends and relatives attended. The puberty ceremony feasts were attended by a large number of people. They were publicized by four fires built up the side of a hill the night of the feast. With only three days of notice, from the onset of the girl's menstruation to the evening of the feast, the gathering and preparation of foods had to be done quickly by the girl's family and relatives. Today this, more than any other event, unites kinsmen into a hard working, well organized, social group. These feasts involved gift and ceremonial exchange. [844] [881] [182] [431]

A second type of feast was sponsored by a task group. A particularly successful hunting, fishing, or gathering trip was often followed by a feast. These feasts involved task group sharing. [22]

A third type of feast was sponsored communally. Feasts that preceded the fall pinenut harvesting (tagum gumsabay?) were of this type. At these times fish and large game would be prepared communally and distributed according to the size of the family. These feasts involved familial sharing and are analogous to the "potluck diner" in our own culture.

Ceremonial Disposal

Ceremonial disposal includes a number of diverse practices among the Washo. The Washo threw a pinch of pinenut meal on the ground before each meal as a ritual propitiation of nature. They offered some food with prayers to nature at the spring and fall dances and when the first samples of each kind of plant food was gathered. These were essentially first-fruit rites. 282 [264] [533] [241]

these mechanisms may be found in other economies in the world along the continuum of technological complexity. 433 [171]

Political Authority and the Economy

Sahlins (1960, 408) writes that "In primitive economies, most production is geared to use of the producers or to discharge of kinship obligations, rather than exchange or gain...control of the means of production is decentralized, local, and familial...economic relations of coercion and exploitation and the corresponding social relations of dependence and mastery are not created in the system of production...in the absence of the incentive given by exchange of the product against a great quantity of goods on a market, there is a tendency to limit production to goods that can be directly utilized by the producers." These statements fit the Washo case and help to explain why the investment of political authority and the possession of wealth are not associated in Washo society.

The ability to produce economic goods, and personal generosity, were two of the most respected qualities in individuals. Men who had these qualities were often given a degree of political authority. That is, their advice was respected and followed. In the broad view, political authority was the result of conformance to a configuration of obligations: economic, religious, kinship, etc. [577]

Sociopolitical Groups and the Economy

Steward (1938, 257-262) presents a theory for the development of sociopolitical groups in the Basin-Plateau area. In his view these groups were conditioned by their varying ecological adjustments. 621 433 22

"The subsistence habits required in each region determined the size, nature, and permanency of population aggregates. These, in turn, predetermined many, though not all, features of social structures and political controls. In some regions, as among Western Shoshoni, exigencies of existence permitted little variation in the general sociopolitical patterns. When, however, ecology allowed latitude in subsistence activities, noneconomic factors, such as warfare, festivals, ceremonies, etc., became determinants of the sociopolitical patterns."

"Among the Western Shoshoni and many of their Northern Paiute and Southern Paiute neighbors it was physically impossible for families either to remain in one place for any considerable time or for more than a few families to remain in permanent association. The outstanding sociopolitical units, [171]

consequently, were the biological family and the small winter village, consisting of a loose aggregate of families...Because...of the erratic occurrence of wild seeds and the frequent variation of terrain covered, alliance did not always bring together the same families or village members. Habitual cooperation of the same people and therefore the development of fixed if limited political allegiances and controls was impossible. Likewise, habitual and exclusive utilization of particular territories by certain groups could not develop...Though kinship ties were important, the uncertainties of residence and of assured association with specific relatives prevented the development of an elaborate and nicely fixed set of kinship duties and obligations..."

Also ecology "permitted, if it did not cause, band development" in Owens Valley and "in late pre-Caucasian times among the Northern Shoshoni and probably the Ute."

The present writer has tried to show that "warfare, festivals, ceremonies, etc." should not be called "noneconomic", although they may be predominantly something other than economic. All groupings have some economic dimensions. However, Steward's point is well taken. He implies that as the natural abundance of food increased or the techniques of exploitation and transportation improved the nature of groupings became less determined by the search for food.

This present writer accepts the major outlines of Steward's theory, but must add that it was not entirely true for the Washo. The Washo had one of the more productive natural environments in the Great Basin and this was reflected in their being closer in form of sociopolitical groupings to the Owens Valley Paiute than the Western Shoshoni. However, when we compare seasonal variations of aboriginal social organization it is clear that predominantly economic activities determined the nature of groupings in the abundant summer as well as the meager winter.

Also Washo sociopolitical groupings were not radically altered by the comparatively abundant food made available by Whites. There is support for the idea that the cultural traditions behind sociopolitical grouping have some degree of internal dynamics and resistence to change, apart from economic changes, in the facts of Washo acculturation.

Barriers to Economic Development

The Washo lived in an area of abundance for a hunting, fishing, and gathering economy. They used this abundance to an advantage and, for a Great Basin tribe, had a dense population. Still they were surprisingly low in economic development. Kroeber (1939, 137) ranked the Washo on the

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Rabbit skins were also cut into strips and woven into warm robes. Conical houses were made of wooden poles and brush thatch for winter weather while a half-dome windbreak served for warm weather.

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The household of a family and relatives in a single winter house was the basic socioeconomic unit of society. Each household worked and shared together in solving the problems of survival and fulfilling social and ritual obligations. The household continued to fish, hunt, and collect its food in a fairly uniform way year after year in the same sector of Washo territory. If the fishing was poor in one place, they moved to another stream. If the pinenuts failed, they went to the west and gathered acorns. And wherever they went, they hunted or gathered what was available: some tree grubs here, a lettuce-like vegetable there, and a squirrel or rabbit or bird at the next place. The procurement and preparation of food was clearly the most time consuming activity in Washo life.

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Men and women often worked together at the same tasks, but there was some division of labor by sex. Men hunted and except for basketry, were the craftsmen who made the clothing, houses, and hunting and fishing gear. Women gathered plant and insect foods, prepared and cooked them, made the baskets, and tended the children. A few individuals specialized to a degree [463] in becoming shamans, midwives, herbalists, or particularly adept in a craft.

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Sharing, as the economic basis of family life, was the very essence of Washo economy. Sharing found expression in the producing task groups that drew members from more than one household. It was through sharing that the vast majority of goods changed hands. Exchange, with a stronger demand for reciprocal equivalence than sharing, characterized the economic aspects of social rituals, as well as the more impersonal forms of distribution such as gambling, trade, and payments made for services rendered.

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Washo economy appears in a few ways to be distinctive in the Great Basin. The Washo ranged a particularly productive environment which allowed them [161] the highest population density in the Basin. The Washo may have had less trade than the surrounding peoples because of several factors, language [439] isolation being one. Pinenut groves were privately owned, a rare phenomenon [423] in the Basin. Washo techniques for gathering and storing pinenuts, in strips and the construction of great caches, is also perhaps unique in the Basin and [251] inadvertantly presented them with another unique phenomenon, overproduction.

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There are still broad gaps in our knowledge of Washo aboriginal life. The data are fairly complete on language and mythology, but the rest of Washo culture has been only sketched out in its major outlines. Most of this is [174] unrecoverable and only by careful interviewing, archeology, and scrutiny of historical documents can we hope to reconstruct a way of life that began to disappear over 100 years ago.

Northern Paiute NR3

Thus the area in which the Washo lived was somewhat more varied than the territories of other groups, encompassing four life zones. This contrasted to the condition of the Paiute as a whole, where some bands existed in relative luxury for gatherers, and others occupied extremely inhospitable areas. The Washo, as a whole, enjoyed a fairly favorable area for hunting and gathering. In aboriginal times there seems to have been little effort to drive other groups out of the area when they entered it to hunt or gather, suggesting that the Washo felt they were amid plenty and that added exploitation would not deprive them. This does not hold for their view of the pinenut areas they utilized. They defended these with vigor, as they also defended fishing sites. There appears to have been a sufficient supply of nuts to permit very large gatherings in the fall at the beginning of the harvest season.

As with the Paiute, the Washo family appears to have been the primary unit of social organization. Families combined into bands that may or may not have had more permanence of membership than did those of the Paiute. Informants insist that families decided the course of their yearly movement independent of any band activities, either joining other bands or going on hunting and gathering treks -- often as far as the Pacific coast -- by themselves.

Band leaders had little, if any, more authority than did their counterparts among the Paiute. When bands gathered for antelope or rabbit hunting a shaman or rabbit boss took charge of the actual hunting operation as was true elsewhere in the Basin. Mountain sheep and mule deer were hunted in small informal groups, the latter occasionally in communal hunts.

The Washo recognized different areas within their territory but to what degree people or bands remained within these territories is not known. Lowie (1939, 301-52) sees incipient moiety formation in this division, but its only expression appears to have been the selection of members of teams to play games during the annual pinenut festival. Certain groups living in the mountains near what is today Woodfords were viewed by other Washo as "crazy," i.e., particularly brave, unpredictable and fierce. This was because, according to informants, these people had a great deal of association with California tribes (Downs, 1961b). The Woodfords group appears to have served traditionally as Washo "shock troops," being called upon for help whenever it was necessary to fight neighboring Indians. Freed (1960, 353) reports that a leader could assemble fighting men by sending a knotted deerhide string to his supporters. My own informants corroborated this but made it clear that no one was compelled to respond. There is no record of interband hostility even to the degree mentioned above for the Paiute.

they did not resist white intrusion, were viewed as less than people, cowardly, without pride and unworthy of consideration. Because the Washo failed to demonstrate their unity as a people by military action they were not considered a unit, and it was not until the last decade of the 19th century that land allotments were made for them. W 175 648

The foregoing discussion of differential responses on the part of the Indians and on the part of white men toward Indians explains in large part the differences in acculturation subsequent to 1870 when the war-like Paiute were contained on reservations. N 175 177 648

As has been pointed out, the Paiute-Plains Indian relationships may well be due to the subsistence activities the two groups had shared in the past. The relationships as of 1858 served to give the Paiute a model of alternative behavior toward the white man, a model based on Plains Indian values and attitudes.

The Washo, however, lived almost entirely outside the buffalo territory. One suspects from this situation that the environment of their area was one that had never included food sources besides those present at the time of contact. We might then say that the Washo were in ecological balance. They did not consciously or unconsciously turn toward peoples with a markedly different ecological adaptation as models of alternative behavior. This is one way of saying that the Paiute were ecologically oriented toward the north and east, and the Washo were ecologically oriented toward the west. Gathering may have been better in California and game animals more plentiful, but essentially the subsistence patterns were much the same as those of the Washo. Thus Washo peoples felt little or no influence from the Plains groups. They continued to look at the horse and cow as food animals to be eaten when possible, but saw no advantage in adopting the horse. The Washo did not totally reject the horse but accepted it only as a convenience in transportation. Many Washo eventually owned wagons and teams and rode horses but used them only within the framework of aboriginal Washo culture patterns and developed neither a new way of life based on the horse nor new values that they attached to the horse. (For a more detailed discussion of Washo response to animal husbandry and agriculture see Downs, 1961a.) N W 177 182 22 ●

In the years subsequent to 1870 the Paiute response pattern continued to be colorful, and in many ways, effective. In the early 1870's the first Ghost Dance was initiated at Mason Valley (Gayton, 1930, 57). This early movement elicited no interest among the Plains tribes or the Washo but was adopted by the seriously disorganized California groups. Shortly after this development the Paiute began to farm both on the reservation and off. A second nativistic movement, originated under Jack Wilson at Walker Lake in N 175 177 648 668